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Vietnam in Kampuchea: No Withdrawal in Sight



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An Intelligence Memorandum

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*PA 81-10251
SR 81-10079
July 1981*

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Vietnam in Kampuchea:**No Withdrawal in Sight**

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Summary

Two and a half years after Vietnam began its costly occupation of Kampuchea, Hanoi still shows no willingness to accept a negotiated solution. The Vietnamese leadership believes that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations will eventually acquiesce in its dominance of Kampuchea and cease supporting the resistance. Vietnam considers its international isolation and heavy dependence on the USSR caused by the occupation of Kampuchea to be short-term expenses. Hanoi might change its mind only if economic and political difficulties in Vietnam itself threatened the authority of the Vietnamese Communist Party; this is an unlikely prospect for the foreseeable future.

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This memorandum was prepared jointly by [redacted] East Asia-Pacific [redacted] Office of Political Analysis, and [redacted] Current Analysis Division, Office of Strategic Research, in the National Foreign Assessment Center. It has been coordinated with the Office of Economic Research and the National Intelligence Officer for China East Asia Pacific. Information as of 24 June 1981 was used in its preparation. Questions or comments may be addressed to the Chief, Southeast Asia Branch, East Asia-Pacific Division, OPA, on [redacted]

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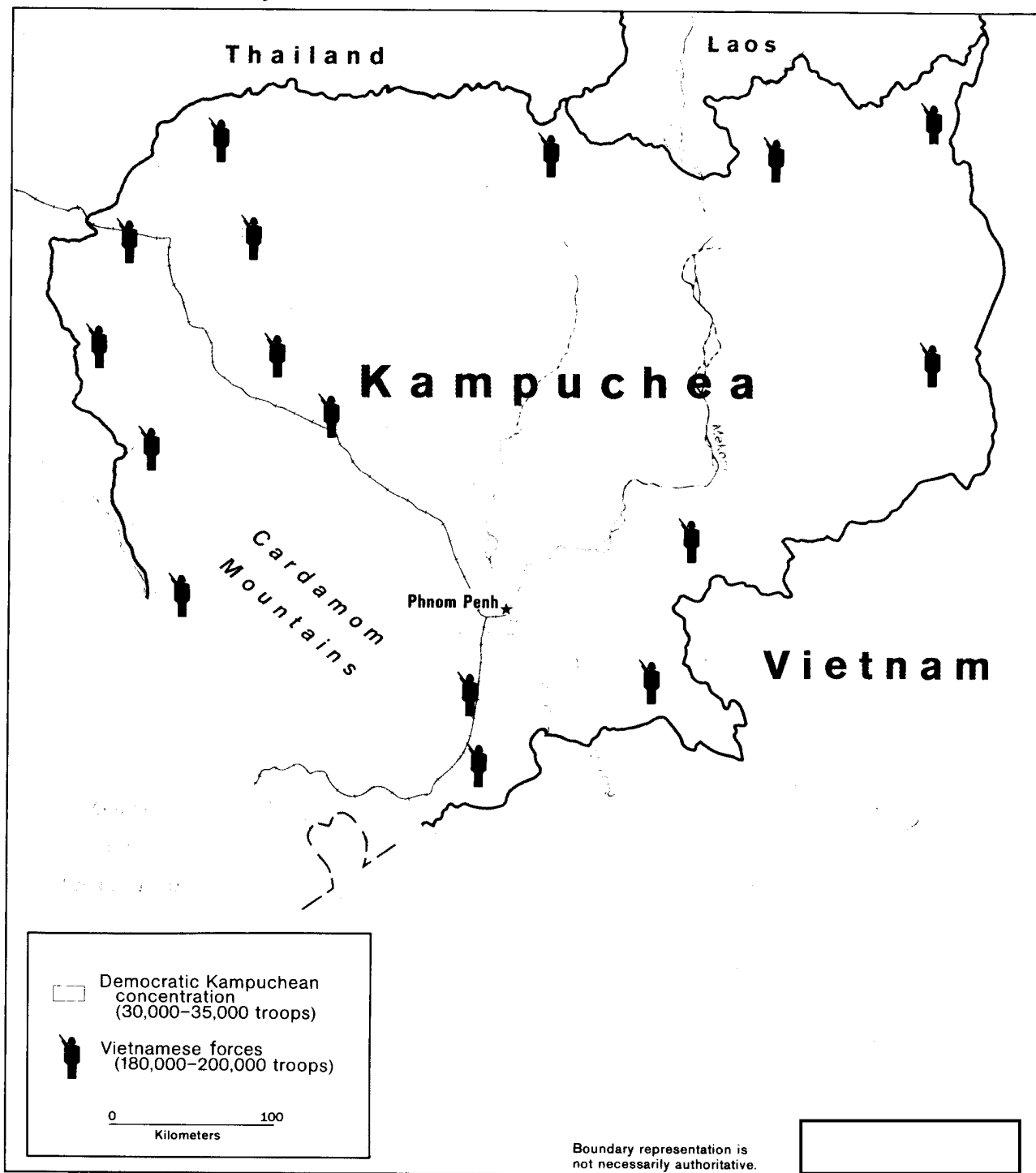
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Kampuchea: Military Situation



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The Military Situation

Vietnamese forces (180,000 to 200,000 men) remain largely in defensive positions near populated areas, lines of communication, and ricegrowing regions. With the rainy season already under way, we believe that the Vietnamese will conduct limited sweep operations but no major offensives until the weather improves next fall. The Democratic Kampuchea (DK) guerrilla campaign has inflicted heavy losses on some Vietnamese units, contributing to high desertions and poor morale. Hanoi apparently has sent several divisions—totaling perhaps as many as 15,000 troops—to Kampuchea, presumably to replace casualties and fill out understrength units.

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Pol Pot's DK forces (30,000 to 35,000 men) are the backbone of the resistance. Over the past year or so, DK forces have stepped up their activities; they are now not only harassing Vietnamese positions in northern and western Kampuchea, but also control portions of several districts in the central and eastern parts of the country. The DK guerrillas have paid special attention to interdicting vital lines of communication serving Vietnamese troops; they have ambushed convoys along Route 6 and blown up portions of the Battambang-Phnom Penh rail line.

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*Democratic Kampuchean
soldier armed with a
Chinese-supplied B-40
rocket*



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This resistance, however, is not likely to become strong enough to oust the Vietnamese. Only Pol Pot and his DK guerrillas constitute a viable military force, and his unpopularity among Kampuchians not only precludes any significant recruiting effort, but has so far prevented any meaningful cooperation with other resistance groups in Kampuchea. Son Sann's Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) is more popular than the DK in refugee camps, but it is not a strong military movement. Most Kampuchians who are aware of Son Sann's organization apparently believe that in any DK-KPNLF alliance the DK would eventually overpower its partner. Other non-Communist resistance forces are small, disorganized groups with little experience in guerrilla warfare. [REDACTED]

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China is bent on bleeding Vietnam's forces in Kampuchea as well as elsewhere in Indochina, and evidently plans to provide increased military assistance to the DK, the KPNLF, and other anti-Vietnamese resistance forces while urging a united front. The Chinese have delivered some light arms to the KPNLF, but the major Chinese effort will continue to be on behalf of the DK, which Beijing believes is the only force capable of causing Vietnam serious trouble. China has delivered substantial quantities of light weapons, munitions, and supplies to the DK over the past two years and will sustain this arms flow. [REDACTED]

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"The People's Republic of Kampuchea"

The Vietnamese could not retain control if they withdrew significant numbers of troops; indeed, the puppet People's Republic of Kampuchea would quickly collapse without Vietnam's backing. Although President Heng Samrin's regime is staffed by Kampuchians, all instruments of state are effectively under Vietnamese control. A recent election for a national assembly allegedly drew nearly 98 percent of the population to the polls, but it did little to gain popularity for the regime. A pro-Vietnamese Communist party, called the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party, recently surfaced, but it is having trouble recruiting reliable cadres untainted by past association with Pol Pot. [REDACTED]

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Kampuchea's economy is at subsistence level and dependent on external aid for about one-third of its food needs. The infrastructure of the pre-1970 years is still largely in shambles, and all Kampuchians live in varying degrees of poverty. Despite these living conditions and the regime's unpopularity, the Khmer people remain generally docile, in part because of their war weariness and perceived inability to do anything effective to change their lot, and in part because of their fear that ouster of the Vietnamese would lead to the return of the more hated Pol Pot. [REDACTED]

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KPNLF soldiers on parade. The banner on the right reads "Defend Our Fatherland To Avoid a Second Champa." Champa was a kingdom in central Vietnam that Vietnamese invaders destroyed in their southward movement in the 18th century, leaving few vestiges of Champa's culture.



UPI ©

A United Front?

China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are pushing the resistance groups to form a united front against the Vietnamese, but the prospects for its formation are only fair. Pol Pot and exiled Prince Sihanouk say that they are willing to form an alliance, but KPNLF leader Son Sann has long resisted taking part in such a union. He fears that association with the DK would undermine his allegedly widespread popular support inside Kampuchea. Son Sann's colleagues in the KPNLF also have a visceral fear and hatred for the DK, which killed many members of their families between 1975 and 1978. [REDACTED] 25X1

In recent months Son Sann has agreed, under heavy international pressure, to negotiate with the DK to form a coalition, but the conditions he poses for joining have effectively barred its formation. He demands that Pol Pot and most of the senior DK leadership be exiled to China; that he lead the new government, which would contain only a few former DK officials; and, most important, that all this take place only after he received enough external support to build up the KPNLF to an effective fighting force of 30,000.

[REDACTED] 25X1

Son Sann may have deliberately posed conditions impossible for the DK and even his own movement to fulfill. While Pol Pot has already stepped down from the formal DK government structure (but remains the effective power), he and other senior officials have indicated that they are unwilling to go into exile. They are on record, however, as being willing to allow the KPNLF to assume the major posts in a revised DK government. The prospect that the KPNLF could expand its fighting forces tenfold in the foreseeable future is remote, even with heavy external assistance. Despite agreement in principle with a united front, Son Sann may, in fact, be sticking to his apparent long-term goals of becoming a credible independent non-Communist force, and

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being available to form a neutralist regime should Vietnam be forced to negotiate a settlement. To do this he must avoid popular identification with Pol Pot or the DK in any form [REDACTED]

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If a coalition were to be formed, it would only marginally help the military resistance and, with the major participants intensely hostile to each other, would be unlikely to endure. DK and KPNLF forces have an explicit agreement not to oppose each other inside Kampuchea, but they refuse to operate as integrated units and are unlikely to do so in the future. The only significant byproduct of such a united front would probably be the reconstitution of a regime that would be more acceptable internationally. [REDACTED]

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Prospects

The Vietnamese are likely to remain in Kampuchea for the foreseeable future. The resistance is likely to go on in some form indefinitely but is unlikely to drive the Vietnamese out. Hanoi can continue to bear the cost of the military occupation as long as it continues to receive Soviet economic and military assistance [REDACTED]

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Hanoi is nonetheless aware that there is more to the cost of staying the course in Kampuchea than continuing the war effort, which is largely paid for by Moscow. At a time when Vietnam's economy is in ruins and the party is suffering from corruption and malaise, the regime's Kampuchea policy is indirectly exacerbating these serious internal problems. New aid from the West (especially Japan and Scandinavia), which is currently all but cut off, would probably resume if Vietnam's Kampuchea policy changed. Vietnam's international isolation would end, and its total dependence on Moscow, which is grating to Vietnamese nationalism, would be reduced. [REDACTED]

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Despite the costs and problems, Vietnam holds on to Kampuchea for two fundamental reasons. Hanoi now has something in its grasp that its leaders have sought for many years—dominance over all Indochina. Because the Vietnamese calculate that the toppling of Pol Pot in 1978 was an act of self-defense against a hostile Chinese surrogate, they also consider dominance of Kampuchea vital to their national security. When historic destiny is combined in Hanoi's eyes with strategic necessity, its motive for staying in Kampuchea is strong [REDACTED]

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Vietnam's leaders believe that they can dominate Kampuchea, along with Laos, and still obtain eventual international acceptance and aid. Their current strategy is to retain their military presence in Kampuchea and seek, through regional negotiations, ASEAN's acquiescence in their dominance in Indochina. They are also hoping for discord between Thailand and China over Kampuchea that would terminate support for the resistance. In exchange, Hanoi would be willing to scale down the size of its occupation force.

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They calculate that their will, and the durability of Soviet support, is stronger than that of the non-Communist countries of Asia and the West.

[REDACTED] 25X1

Vietnam's confidence would be shaken only if the economic and social deterioration at home reached the point of threatening the social fabric of the state. Despite the gravity of current conditions, that point does not appear to be near. Moreover, Moscow is unlikely to let its client collapse, although it would exact a heavy price in economic and military concessions for emergency assistance [REDACTED]

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Military Forces in Kampuchea

	Troop Strength	Weapons	Comments
Vietnam	180,000-200,000	An array of mostly Soviet-made weapons	Mostly unwilling draftees from the south led by northerners
People's Republic of Kampuchea	20,000	US- and Soviet-made equipment provided by Vietnamese	An ineffective force given little responsibility by the Vietnamese
Democratic Kampuchea	30,000-35,000	Well equipped with small arms supplied by China	Communists with strong leadership
Khmer People's National Liberation Front	3,000-5,000	Recently equipped with minor amount of Chinese small arms	Non-Communist with little contact with Vietnamese forces so far; lack guerrilla experience
Moulinaka	Over 500	Few small arms	Non-Communist, loyal to Sihanouk
Khmer Serei	Several hundred	Irregular supply of small arms	Non-Communist, organized into small groups; involved largely in cross-border smuggling operations

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